

New composting law takes effect in S.F.

By Amanda Smith-Teutsch

A new San Francisco composting law went into effect Oct. 21, mandating that residents of San Francisco separate their compostable items — such as food scraps, lawn trimmings and soiled paper — from recyclables and waste.

"This ramp-up is already working," said Robert Reed of Recology, the city's waste management company. Recology collects the trash, recycling and compost bins positioned throughout the city. The program began in 2001 as a voluntary measure, Reed said. To date, about half of San Francisco's households and 37% of its restaurants have compost carts in addition to trash and recycling bins, he said.

"This year we collected 500 tons of food scraps per day in the city," Reed said. "That is up from 400 tons per day last year."

Mark Westlund, education program manager for the city, said the ordinance has been successful.

"Just since the ordinance was passed in June, collections have increased," he said. "To no small degree, this ordinance is a success, even before it goes into effect."

Recology had been getting requests for 10 to 15 new green carts per day, and after the legislation passed, requests went up to 150 per day, Westlund said.

The Board of Supervisors of the county and city passed the law this summer in an effort to help meet its goal of diverting 75% of its waste from landfills or incineration by 2010.

Residents must place compostable materials, such as food waste, yard trimmings and soiled paper, in green carts,



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which are then collected. Separate carts for recyclable and non-recyclable waste are also provided. Failure to use or provide the carts could result in fines, the law states.

In justifying the law, the board of supervisors wrote that even with aggressive recycling programs, the city still sent 660,000 tons of waste to the landfill in 2006. The city has a contract to send 15 million tons of waste to the Alameda County Landfill.

At the end of 2007, the city had only 3 tons of capacity remaining before it had to renegotiate or find a new waste disposal site.

Studies the city conducted showed that of the waste being sent to the landfill, 36% was primarily food scraps and therefore compostable.

Supervisors said the law is a way to extend the life of its solid waste disposal agreement, which at current disposal rates will run

out in 2013.

Fines for violating the law begin at \$100, the ordinance states.

The food scraps collected by Recology are composted and distributed to local farms and vineyards.

Farmers and vineyard owners use the compost to grow cover crops with deep root structures such as mustard and beans.

These plants draw carbon in part from the air, Reed said, and return carbon to the soil. Studies estimate the process so far returns 12,000 pounds of carbon a year to the soil.

"This is the only way to sequester carbon in the soil," Reed said. "Once people become aware of the power of this program and the way it enables the earth to store carbon, they say want to be a part of it." ■

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